



Blog: Context of the Native American Language Resource Center (NALRC)

The Foundation

The efforts of Native communities to educate and advocate for their rights and interests extend far beyond the classroom and often reach into the legislative and policy arenas, including Congress. The persistence and determination of these communities play a crucial role in shaping policies that affect preservation of their languages and cultures, sovereignty, and overall well-being. The creation of the Native American Language Resource Center (NALRC) is an example of the determination of Native peoples and their advocacy in these areas.

The NALRC began with the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (NALA). This legislation played a crucial role in establishing federal policy that supports the right of Native American students to receive education in their Native languages. NALA recognizes the importance of preserving and revitalizing Indigenous languages and supports educational opportunities in alignment with the linguistic and cultural heritage of Native American communities.

The Legislation

Building on the foundation laid by NALA, the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2022 aims to enhance the efforts to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages. This new legislation seeks to provide additional resources, support, and coordination for initiatives related to Native American language education, documentation, and revitalization. By aligning with the spirit and intentions of NALA, NALRC emphasizes the importance of preserving Native American languages as vital components of cultural identity and heritage.

The NALRC represents a significant step forward for Native American languages by addressing the Act's key activities and goals

- **Improving Language Teaching and Learning Capacity:** The Native American Language Resource Center Act supports developing effective teaching methods, creating educational materials, and providing training for educators.
- **Furthering Language Use and Acquisition:** The Act seeks to promote the increased use and acquisition of Native American languages within indigenous communities, including encouraging spoken and written language use.



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- **Preserving, Protecting, and Promoting Rights and Freedoms:** The Act is intended to uphold the rights and freedoms of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop their native languages.
- **United States Trust Responsibility:** The Act acknowledges the federal trust responsibility to Native American communities, including supporting language preservation and revitalization efforts.
- **Addressing Past Discrimination and Inequities:** Efforts to revitalize Native American languages address the historical discrimination and ongoing inequities faced by Native American speakers.
- **Revitalization and Reclamation:** The Act supports the revitalization and reclamation of Native American languages that have faced decline.
- **Use of Native American Languages in Education:** The Act promotes using Native American languages as a medium of instruction across different age levels, academic subjects, and educational institutions.

Early Implementation

In 2022-23, the Office of Indian Education (OIE) took steps toward enacting the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2022. It began with the development of the NALRC website. This work included gathering existing resources related to Native American language preservation and instruction, linguistic documentation, and cultural materials. On Nov. 17, 2022, OIE hosted an engagement session that brought together language speakers, educators, linguists, community leaders, Tribal government members, and other stakeholders. The attendees contributed their expertise and feedback on website design and content. On Jan. 24, 2023, a Tribal Consultation was conducted to elicit feedback on administration of the NALRC legislation.

The OIE continues to collect information and categorize language resources that align with the Act's goals. Resources pertain to areas such as language preservation and immersion programming. The NALRC provides ongoing resource submission and community feedback avenues through a dedicated submission form and a centralized email address. These resources, along with other tools for Native language stakeholders, are housed on a website that launched in September 2023. Some other resources include teacher certification information, a searchable listing of higher education programs for Native language and culture, and a searchable listing of existing Native language programming offered through other entities.



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Looking Forward

By leveraging existing resources, engaging the expertise of the Native language community, and aligning the website's content with the Act's purpose, the OIE laid a solid foundation for the continuing and evolving work of the Native American Language Resource Centers. This collaborative and purpose-driven approach honors the persistence and determination of our communities that have carried Native language preservation and the associated legislative advocacy.

In addition to the launch of the NALRC website, the OIE held a competitive grant competition in summer of 2023 to create a national Native American Language Resource Center and multiple regional centers. The OIE announced the recipients of these initial NALRC grant awards in September 2023. The centers will preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedoms of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages in furtherance of NALA policies and the United States trust responsibility to Tribal nations. Centers will be staffed by individuals with relevant expertise and experience, including staff who speak American Indian, Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian languages and have worked in Native language education in preschool, elementary school, secondary school, adult education, or higher education programs.